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ABSTRACT

This report summarizes a case study that used participant observation and interviews to investigate an exemplary second-grade teacher's beliefs about events relating to her classroom. Resources for planning and interpreting study results included the works of Kelly, Merleau-Ponty, Stake, Freire, and Glidewell. Data were collected in three phases: (1) an extended interview with the teacher; (2) 8 weeks of classroom observations, followed by interviews; and (3) 2 weeks of informal talks and intensive participant observation in the classroom. Four general categories of teacher beliefs emerged from the data; these respectively concerned becoming and being a teacher, children, parents, and curriculum. A general theme present in the data was the teacher's conceptualization of the "enterprise," or her viewing herself as part of a group of persons sharing an investment in the school. Issues relating to purpose, support, and power were evident in her conceptualizations of both the enterprise and her own classroom. Resolution of these issues was facilitated by the teacher's valuing being comfortable, avoiding conflict, and adhering to an authority model. Finally, it was suggested that, for a teacher to thrive in a school as the subject did, there needs to be congruency between the teacher's conception of the classroom and the enterprise. (CB)

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AN ANALYSIS OF ONE EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHER'S BELIEFS ABOUT THE EVENTS OF HER CLASSROOM

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AN ANALYSIS OF ONE EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHER'S BELIEFS ABOUT THE EVENTS OF HER CLASSROOM.

A line of research has evolved which helps to fill the interstice between the professional worlds of the public school classroom teacher and the university and college professor. This work has helped us to understand teaching by studying teachers' thoughts as well as actions. The following study is one more in that line of research.

Purpose and Theoretical Framework of the Study

The purpose of the study was to illuminate one early childhood teacher's understandings of the events related to her own classroom. The study was grounded in the assumption that early childhood teachers hold beliefs about the events of their own classrooms and that they can make these explicit. This understanding evolved from previous studies that are related to teachers' beliefs, (e. g., Bussis et al, 1976; N. King, 1976; R. King, 1978: Halliwell, 1980; and Berlak and Berlak, 1982).

The usage of the term "events" reflects Glasse's (1979) contention that the term designates "descriptions, not of 'problems' nor 'issues' nor 'failures' nor 'successes' but of a piece of practice" (p. 85). Glasse further defines an event as an "occasion in which the professional acts as a responsible agent" (p. 86). The term "beliefs" indicates what Spodek (1982) has described as the implicit and explicit meanings that teachers assign to events in their professional world. The term, as used here, encompasses what Mandl and Hubner (1982) have designated as "subjective theories" in their words -- "the interaction of individual belief systems (convictions), subjective interpretations, naive conclusions, personal constraints, and habits in handling education situations" (p. 1). Both the research of Spodek and that of Mandl and Hubner have drawn upon the personal construct theory of George Kelly (1955). Kelly views human beings as scientists trying to make sense out of the world. As a psychologist, Kelly concerned himself with the way a person construes reality. Each person, through lived experiences, forms mental constructs of the world and moves forward expecting the world to be as personally constructed. Kelly stressed that personal constructs were both cognitive and affective, implicit and explicit.

The theory of the philosopher, Merleau-Ponty, (1962) was helpful in further developing a theoretical framework for the study. Unlike Kelly, Ponty concerns himself with an absolute reality which, for Ponty can never be fully known. One can only gain further illumination of the otherness of the world. Making a phenomenon more explicit involves describing the phenomenon from a variety of perspectives. One might describe its history, its content, its configuration, its relation to other phenomena, or its likeness to, or difference from, other similar phenomena.

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This case study describes one individual's conceptualization of the events of one specific classroom. Stake (1978) has described the significance of such a case study: "As readers recognize essential similarities to cases of interest to them, they establish the basis for naturalistic generalization" (p. 7). Thus, persons who become familiar with this case study can relate it to their own experiences and expand their understandings of what it's like to be a teacher in the real world of a primary grade.

The Teacher Studied

Mrs. Katherine Lylton was viewed as an exemplary, second-grade teacher by both her principal and the superintendent of her school district. She was a white, middle-class teacher working in a predominantly white, middle-class, suburban community. Her diverse experiences as a university instructor, a school board member, and a parent, as well as her ability to clearly articulate her own observations and understandings, made her an inviting subject for the research. At the time of the study she had been teaching second grade for five years at Central Avenue School. The preceding six years she had been a kindergarten teacher at Central Avenue School.

The Methodology

Data for this case study was collected in three phases. The first was an extended, semi-structured interview designed to uncover the teacher's understandings about her own background and experiences, the school, her present group of children, and her present use of time, space and materials. The second phase involved observations in the classroom, followed by interviews with the teacher and the collection of relevant documents. As a participant-observer, I spent an average of three hours a week for an eight-week period in the teacher's classroom or in situations related to the classroom. The focus of the interviews was on pieces of practice observed which involved decision-making on the part of the teacher. Topics introduced by the teacher were followed in the interview. The third phase involved two weeks of intensive participant-observation in the classroom and informal talks with the teacher as opportunities arose. Audio tapes were made during all of the interviews and transcripts were made of each tape. Content analysis of the data was ongoing.

When the data collection and analysis was completed, a summary of the teacher's beliefs was given to the teacher for verification. Discrepancies were rectified and became part of the data. A literary description of the case was then written. Names of persons involved were changed so that their identities would not be evident to future readers.

Limitations

As a researcher, working within a phenomenological framework, my task was to make explicit one early childhood teacher's beliefs

about the events of her classroom. Such phenomena can never be fully known, for no matter how extensive the description there would always be more to be uncovered. A phenomenology of the teacher's beliefs involved describing different aspects of those beliefs. My own conceptualization of the world of teachers and my own values and interests related to that world flavored the decision-making situations and the teacher's comments that I chose to explore for this was uniquely my study of a unique teacher. Someone else might have done it differently. What emerged were my understandings of the teacher's beliefs which were confirmed by the teacher, for the purpose of the research was to illuminate, as clearly as I could, the teacher's way of making sense out of the world in which she worked.

There were some further limitations set by my single researcher's approach to the study. Since I served as the data-gathering instrument, questions of reliability had to be addressed. Another person, familiar with the field of early childhood education and with the methodology used, was asked to examine the data from time to time as the study progressed, so there was a monitor on my perceptions and interviewing techniques. This other person viewed the data as having the "ring of truth to it."

Major Findings

Four general categories, each with a number of sub-categories, emerged from the data. Evident were the teacher's beliefs related to (1) becoming and being a teacher, (2) children, (3) parents, and (4) curriculum. What also became explicit as Mrs. Lylton reflected on her classroom-related behavior was that there were congruities between and among the four categories and their sub-categories. Her actions made sense to her, given her understanding of her responsibilities as a teacher and her typification of her present group of children.

For example, she saw the children as less mature than other second-graders she had worked with in other years. Part of their immaturity she saw as exhibited in sporadic, inattentive behavior. Because, for Mrs. Lylton, her job as a teacher was to teach the district curriculum, she arranged her classroom space, time, and materials in a way that she felt would allow the children to focus on what she considered to be appropriate tasks related to the prescribed curriculum.

Persons with specific interests relating to early childhood education could find any or all of the four chapters describing Mrs. Lylton's beliefs in relation to these categories and their interactions helpful. For example, teacher-educators could find Mrs. Lylton's beliefs about her own teacher-preparation useful in thinking through issues relating to their own programs. Ways in which Mrs. Lylton typified the children in her class might be of value to persons concerned with development of children during the school years. Parent-educators, psychologists and social workers could find Mrs. Lylton's beliefs about parents to be a starting place for thinking through their school-related concerns. Administrators, teacher-educators, and classroom

teachers would find a focus for dialogue in Mrs. Lylton's beliefs about curriculum.

A general theme flowed throughout the data and was related to the teacher's conceptualization of what I came to call "the enterprise." This enterprise involved the teacher's viewing herself as part of a group of persons sharing an investment in something of significance -- the school. The group encompassed the school principal, teachers, secretaries, janitors, and some part-time specialists. The complexities, the contradictions, the questions, and the commitments within the teacher's beliefs, in relation to the four categories and the ways in which these were intertwined within the enterprise, are also described in the case study. There was a congruency between Mrs. Lylton's beliefs about the events related to her classroom and her beliefs about the enterprise.

Seymore Sarason (1982) suggests that most of us have been reared on a "psychology of individuals" and that "it becomes increasingly difficult to become aware that individuals operate in various settings with structures not comprehensible by our existing theories of individual personalities." He further advocates that "there is a distinct structure pattern that governs roles and interrelationships within that setting." Sarason stresses that "what is implied .... is that structures antecede any one individual and will continue in the absence of that individual" (pp. 26-27).

Just as indicated by Sarason, Mrs. Lylton's school, Central Avenue, had its own organization. The structure of the school reflected our dominant culture's view of the public elementary school, some indicators being the physical plant, the furnishings, equipment and materials, staffing, expectations of the various personnel, and the use of time.

The philosophy that Mrs. Lylton had been comfortable with in the preschool where she began her early childhood teaching had been transportable, at least initially, to Central Avenue School. The importance which she placed on her feeling valued and supported was also reflected in the school's emotional climate. There was a fit between Mrs. Lylton and Central Avenue School.

Three issues and their resolutions that were found in Mrs. Lylton's understandings about the events related to her own classroom were also evident in her conceptualization of the enterprise. These were the issues of purpose, support, and power. Resolution of these issues was sustained through the teacher's thoughts and actions reflecting her valuing (1) being comfortable (2) avoiding conflict, and (3) adhering to an authority model. The three issues and their resolutions present in Mrs. Lylton's beliefs about the events of her classroom and the enterprise are discussed below.

Purpose. Mrs. Lylton viewed the primary purpose of the enterprise as teaching the prescribed district curriculum. This was the public curriculum. The personal attributes curriculum of her classroom was also, for her, a valuable component of the enterprise. Mrs. Lylton's facilitation of listening, cooperating, valuing individual differences, accepting personal imperfections, and knowing when there were choices and when there were not also had parallels within the enterprise.

According to Mrs. Lylton, it was necessary for the teachers to listen and to share honestly with others so that the enterprise's major task could be accomplished. Mrs. Lylton explained that this year, because she had received faulty information about the reading skills of a group of children, she had incorrectly placed an entire reading group. This was something that had not happened to her before within the enterprise and, therefore, was seen as an exception. Teachers at Central Avenue School could, in general, be counted upon to communicate adequately about the children to the next year's teachers. It was also a teacher's responsibility to pass on verbally to the next year's teacher any relevant data that might present problems for the new teacher or the children.

Teachers within the enterprise cooperated so that all of the children would receive an appropriate education. As in the case of Conrad, children were sent to different classrooms if the skills being taught there were seen as more in keeping with their needs than those taught in their own classrooms. Mrs. Lylton said that all of the children were the responsibility of all of the adults at Central Avenue School and not just the responsibility of the child's classroom teacher. If a child needed help or guidance, it could come from anywhere within the enterprise. Cooperation was purposefully advocated within the enterprise, just as it was purposefully taught in Mrs. Lylton's classroom.

Individual differences among the teachers were seen by Mrs. Lylton as being valued within the enterprise. She mentioned that the early childhood teachers all taught the same things but in different ways.

The final component of Mrs. Lylton's personal attributes curriculum, which was purposefully taught in her classroom and also evident in the enterprise, was that sometimes there were choices and sometimes there were not -- a component discussed later under the issue of "power."

Mrs. Lylton saw the purposes of the enterprise as being consistent with her own classroom-related purposes. Within the enterprise, she gained support for her work and gave support to others for theirs.

Support. For Mrs. Lylton, Central Avenue School seemed to be a place where people did not just survive but rather where they thrived, feeling good about themselves and their work. Just as Mrs. Lylton concerned herself with the children's feelings,

the others within the enterprise were seen by her as also considering feelings.

Teachers' opinions were also respected. When an expert's opinion differed from that of a teacher, Mr. Neuma, the principal, supported the teacher's view.

Teachers also received support in the form of released time and additional resources when their own special interests coincided with the tasks which the district wanted to accomplish, as did Mrs. Lylton's in relation to the (1) development of curriculum for gifted children, and (2) new social science curriculum.

Mrs. Lylton saw the primary teachers at Central Avenue School as working together to maintain a continuity of goals. The second-grade teachers conferred with the first-grade teachers about children who would be coming into their classrooms, and with the third-grade teachers in regard to the children that would be moving on to the third grade. Individual children and their specific needs were also discussed. Although their ways of teaching differed as each developed a methodology related to the individual's skills and life experiences, Mrs. Lylton saw the teachers as supporting each other as they worked toward common goals and objectives. She also saw support as coming from outside of the enterprise. Persons within the enterprise worked with children and their parents. The task of the enterprise was to teach. Therefore, the families within the community which the school served, while not members of the enterprise, interacted with the enterprise. Parents were supportive through fundraising activities, helping out in the classroom and with special events, and by serving as resource persons.

Power. Mrs. Lylton's concept of leadership within the microcosm of her own classroom seemed congruent with her understanding of Mr. Neuma's (the principal's) leadership within the macrocosm of the school. Clearly, Mr. Neuma was in charge at Central Avenue School as Mrs. Lylton was in control of her own classroom. Sometimes, in both the school and the classroom, other persons had choices and sometimes there was only one way of doing things for everyone. The determination was made by Mr. Neuma for the school and by Mrs. Lylton in her classroom.

One major aspect of Mrs. Lylton's personal attributes curriculum involved her teaching the children that sometimes there were choices and sometimes there were not. Mrs. Lylton did not make explicit who determined when there were choices and when there were not, as well as the basis for that determination. The smooth operation of the classroom indicated there were implicit rules and that the children were picking up on teacher-provided cues which allowed them to know when they had choices and when they did not. However, when Mrs. Lylton asked the children if they had a choice it seemed as if the correct answer was a matter of guesswork. She asked them if they had a choice and they

responded, "Yes." Her way of asking again suggested that they had answered wrongly the first time. The children's second response, "No," was accepted by Mrs. Lylton as the right answer. The children knew who decided if they had a choice or not. There seemed to be a distinct hierarchy in which the children deferred to the teacher and the teacher deferred to the principal. In Riesman's words, children were being "sensitized to the expectations and preferences of others" (1952, p. 9).

Mrs. Lylton shared with me that several years ago both she and the other second-grade teacher, Miss Kelly, had some misgivings about including the children of their two classrooms in the "School Olympics" tug-of-war. The two groups had been antagonistic toward each other all year. The two teachers felt that the competition involved in the event would not be healthy for these two groups. (Mrs. Lylton also questioned the appropriateness of the event for second-graders.)

Mr. Neuma listened to what the two teachers had to say, but in the end he determined that the two second grades would have their tug-of-war. According to Mrs. Lylton, he viewed the event as a good one for the children. When I asked her "Why?" she was not sure. Nevertheless, Mr. Neuma was in charge. He determined when there were choices and when there were not in the school at large, just as Mrs. Lylton did in her classroom. Did Mrs. Lylton see herself as having the choice of keeping her students out of the tug-of-war and rejecting that choice as not being a viable one, or did she see herself as not having a choice? Whatever Mrs. Lylton's view of the situation, she seemed to be teaching the children that the distinction of whether or not a choice existed was at the discretion of the authority.

Mrs. Lylton's belif was that children should learn that sometimes there are choices and sometimes there are not. In a phenomenology of a teacher's beliefs, one way of describing a phenomenon (in this situation the belief about choices) is to contrast it with another possibility. An alternative to Mrs. Lylton's belief about choices would be Glidewell's (1970, 1972) belief that, with the exception of one's time of death, a person always has choices. The choices may not be those desired, but choices are there. With the assumption of this view would come the task of helping children to develop skills in decision-making. The question would not be, "Is there a choice?" but "What are the viable choices offered within the system?" A stance, similar to Glidewell's, could facilitate a sense of autonomy in children rather than support their automatic responses to authority. The latter could result when authority is viewed as an unchallenged determiner of when there are choices and when there are not. An emphasis on the development of autonomy would call for a different personal attributes curriculum than the one used in Mrs. Lylton's classroom.

The power which the teacher had in her classroom and which the principal had in the school was tempered by some constraints, as well as by their own experiences and limitations. Mr. Neuma and

Mrs. Lylton were constrained in their roles by the expectations of the school board and the community which the board represented. There were also controls imposed by the State. Mr. Neuma was answerable to the superintendent as Mrs. Lylton was to Mr. Neuma, the principal of the school. Mrs. Lylton saw herself as having the freedom to develop her own methodology for planning, but she was required to have three days' worth of plans ready at any given time in the event a substitute teacher was needed for her classroom.

One problem for Mrs. Lylton within the enterprise was what she described as Mr. Neuma's failure to let teachers know when music, art, or gym teachers and aides would not be working with students. Interestingly, she saw this failure on his part as also a strength in that through his actions he was giving the teachers the message that he was not perfect and he did not expect them to be perfect either. However, just as were the children in Mrs. Lylton's room, the adults within the enterprise seemed to be well-socialized into what implicitly and explicly constituted proper school behavior. The line of command was clearly defined.

Maintaining a source of power, support, and purpose. Three things which are discussed below seemed to facilitate the ongoing power, shared purpose, and support which Mrs. Lylton saw as part of the enterprise. These were: (1) her understanding that persons should feel comfortable; (2) the avoidance of conflict, which helped to maintain comfort, and (3) the adherence to a model of power.

Persons should feel comfortable. That persons should feel comfortable is a theme flowing throughout the data presentation. Mrs. Lylton was concerned that both she and I feel comfortable about the way I worked as a participant-observer. She felt that the school was a place where adults and children should feel comfortable. When she was in the process of becoming a teacher, she adopted skills and understandings that felt comfortable for her. She chose to work in a setting that was comfortable. She allowed the children to sit comfortably in their seats. In contrast, there seemed to be three situations in which it was all right for persons to feel uncomfortable.

It appeared to be acceptable for the children to be uncomfortable when they took the end-of-the-book tests. That was the only time she insisted that they sit in any specific way.

It was tolerable for parents to be uncomfortable, as in the case of Lisa's parents, if a child's placement and treatment, as requested by parents, was seen by school personnel as not being in the best interests of the child. It was only when she and Mr. Neuma felt that what Lisa's parents wanted for Lisa and her twin sister was not in the best interests of the children that they confronted the parents and told them that what the parents had asked them to do was not working. The girls were not benefiting from being protected from negative feedback. In fact, Lisa had

told her parents that the teacher thought she was dumb because the teacher did not treat her like the other children. It was all right for Lisa's parents to be uncomfortable because for them to be comfortable was not in the best interests of the girls. Mrs. Lylton felt that Lisa "was not making progress commensurate with her abilities." Mrs. Lylton also said, "For a little girl who has all of these other skills it doesn't make sense that she be at the bottom of the class."

It would have been helpful for me to have been present at the parent conference. However, although Mrs. Lylton would have welcomed me, Mr. Neuma would not allow me to be there. What Mrs. Lylton shared with me indicated that in the conferences with Lisa's parents both she and another second-grade teacher who had Lisa's twin sister in her classroom had worked at joint problem-solving with the parents. Perhaps the parents were not open to working out ways of dealing with their daughters' school problems with the teachers. Perhaps the parents' ideas continued to be unacceptable to the teachers.

Again, a phenomenological approach invites contrasting the above possibility with an alternative approach. While the approach described below may not have been a viable option, given the enterprise's commitment to the district's prescribed curriculum, it may help illuminate Mrs. Lylton's beliefs related to the events of her own classroom.

Freire (1970, 1983) describes a process of dialogue in which each party works with the other to name reality -- in this case what might have been getting in the way of the children's learning. To have such a dialogue in this situation would have required the acceptance of a different paradigm of education than that of Central Avenue School. The Freire paradigm would involve a search for program content and methodology, rather than the acceptance of a prescribed curriculum.

An interesting question is, "Why was the district's prescribed curriculum such an important part of the enterprise?" Perhaps it was because when a teacher knows precisely what it is the teacher is expected to do, the teacher can feel comfortable doing it. Mrs. Lylton alluded to this when she described her commitment to the district curriculum. "That's my job -- to do those things which are required of me and to do them well."

Possibly, the clearly defined curriculum is what allowed the enterprise to function smoothly. Teachers could be comfortable knowing that they were teaching what they were supposed to teach. It was all right for parents to be uncomfortable if their wishes were not what the teachers viewed as in the best interests of the child.

The third situation of allowed discomfort was when Mrs. Lylton accepted her own discomfort and that of her colleague when Mr. Neuma insisted that their second-graders participate in the tug-of-war.

For Mrs. Lylton, the times that being uncomfortable were viewed as acceptable were: during tests; for what the school personnel saw as in the best interests of the child; and in response to the mandate of an authority. In general, an important aspect of any situation for Mrs. Lylton was that persons should feel comfortable. Often, in order to see that persons were comfortable, conflict-engendering situations were avoided.

The avoidance of conflict. Mrs. Lylton seemed to avoid conflict in three ways. One was to deny its existence or to explain it. For example, when there was a mismatch between where the children were and the curriculum, Mrs. Lylton explained this resulted from what she viewed as the children's "mindlessness." Her conceptualization was different from that of some of the teachers in Ronald King's study (1978). In two of King's schools, the British teachers were from a different socio-economic class than the students they taught, and therefore could blame the students' parents for the mismatch between the children and the curriculum. King's teachers felt that if the parents would take care of the children properly, the children would learn.

Mrs. Lylton lived in the same community in which she taught. She, herself, was a parent and an active participant in the life of the community. To blame the parents for the absence of the match would not have worked for her. Neither the British teachers nor Mrs. Lylton considered that the problem of the absence of a match between the children and the curriculum might have been with the curriculum.

A second way in which Mrs. Lylton avoided conflict was to use her own understanding of the ways in which other persons construct their realities, so that she could be supportive of others and work with them to accomplish the purposes of the enterprise. For example, she did not try to change Joanne's (her first-grade colleague's) constructs about teaching. Rather, she worked to delineate for herself what those were and then to provide transitions for the children from the way in which Joanne taught them as first-graders to the way she wanted to teach them as second-graders. She also attempted to work within the constructs of the parents as long as she did not view these as incompatible with her view of the best interests of the child.

A third way in which Mrs. Lylton dealt with conflict was to assume a position of authority as she did when she flicked the lights on and off and told the boys to sit down. While this was often softened with a twist of humor, Mrs. Lylton was clearly in charge in her classroom. She was in charge there as the principal was in charge of the school, as a whole.

Adhering to authority. The integration of Mrs. Lylton's beliefs within a climate in which persons could be comfortable and conflict avoided was feasible within an enterprise with two clear realms of authority. For Mrs. Lylton, authority existed within the organizational structure of the school and in the prescribed district curriculum.

The power of authority existing within organizational structure has been described by Galbraith (1983).

> "The acceptance of authority, the submission to the will of others, becomes the higher preference of those submitting. This preference can be deliberately cultivated -- by persuasion or education. This is explicit conditioning. Or it can be dictated by the culture itself. The submission is considered to be normal, proper, or traditionally correct. This is implicit conditioning. No sharp line divides one from the other. Explicit conditioning shades by degree into implicit" (pp. 24-25)

Persons within the enterprise (i. e., principal, teachers, staff, auxiliary personnel) and those outside the enterprise (parents, members of the community) seemed to have been well-socialized explicitly and implicitly into what could be symbolized as a pyramid. Authority was recognized by the children and their parents in the teachers and other school personnel, and in turn was acknowledged in the person of the principal who sat on the point of the pyramid. Within the larger pyramid were smaller pyramids in the formal form of committees and task forces, and in the informal form of personalities, properties, and spheres of influence.

Mrs. Lylton viewed those within the enterprise as sharing a common purpose -- the teaching of the prescribed district curriculum. She described herself as committed to that task. The prescribed curriculum seemed to have authority within the institution of the school in much the same way the Bible has authority within the institution of the church. Persons interpreted and acted on it in different ways, but it remained "the Word." In keeping with the school/church parallel, the personal attributes curriculum taught along with the prescribed curriculum at Central Avenue School could be viewed as the informal doctrine -- those rules also taught within the church which are not part of the formal dogma but which also hold authority (i.e., what you wear or don't wear, do or don't do, say or don't say).

Manolakes (1983) has suggested that Mrs. Lylton took a vow in relation to the prescribed curriculum. Again, the church metaphor seems appropriate in that a vow within the church, whether taken by the clergy or by a couple at a wedding, or by a group of persons at a child's baptism, involves what Mrs. Lylton has described herself as having -- commitment. Not only was the act of teaching the prescribed curriculum and the personal attributes curriculum important, that was the mission of the enterprise. The point that it was for Mrs. Lylton a shared purpose, supported by the group, gave it power within the group. Persons knew what they were to do, so they could move on and do that without conflict and feel comfortable in the process.

Conclusion

Viewed as exemplary by her principal, superintendent, and members of her community, Mrs. Lylton's way of being a teacher fit with what the community felt that children should learn. There were congruencies between and among her beliefs about teachers, children, parents, curriculum, and ways these intertwined within the enterprise. She clearly was able to make explicit her own theories underlying her actions in her classroom.

Mrs. Lylton's curriculum prepared children to thrive within their white, middle-class, socio-economic and cultural setting where they could live comfortable, unconflicted lives as long as they adhered to the authority of the valued institution within the milieu. However, the aspects of their schooling which facilitate a comfortable, unconflicted life style could also be restrictive, getting in the way of children's expanding, modifying, and questioning their own personal constructs of the world.

All classrooms exist within the structure of a school. Each teacher who remains within a school setting for any length of time makes sense out of the way the events of her classroom fit into that structure. A teacher who chooses to remain in a classroom in a specific school may do so for a variety of reasons, economic or emotional. Perhaps for a teacher to thrive in a school as Mrs. Lylton did, there needs to be a fit between that teacher's views of self and the school -- a congruency between the teacher's conception of the classroom and the enterprise. Possibly, problem areas for teachers may exist in those places where incongruencies of such beliefs exist.

An examination of a teacher's beliefs about the teacher's own classroom and the teacher's beliefs about the school, within the framework of the issues of power, purpose, and support, could help teachers, administrators, teacher-educators, and other interested persons to more clearly delineate those problem areas. Maybe the shared understandings of a staff in relation to power, purpose, and support are what allow a school to become a vibrant enterprise. This could be true of any educational setting from a nursery school to a department of a large university.

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